

Institution: University of Surrey		
Unit of Assessment: 24 Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism		
Title of case study: Supporting the emotional wellbeing of hypermobile travellers		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Scott Cohen	Professor of Tourism and Transport, School Director of Research, Head of Department of Tourism and Transport.	February 2012 – present
Dr Paul Hanna	Senior Lecturer and Research Director in Clinical Psychology	August 2014 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2019		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>Professor Scott Cohen's research on the physiological, psychological, emotional and social consequences of frequent or excessive travel has led to an improvement in the emotional wellbeing of hypermobile travellers. Media coverage of Cohen's research moved the risks of hypermobility up the agenda of employers, who came to view this as a business risk concern. <i>International SOS</i>, the world's largest medical and travel security services firm, used Cohen's research as a basis from which to construct and launch the world's first emotional support service for the mobile workforce. Used by 1,000 organisations, the service provides rapid-response psychological counselling, and has safeguarded the emotional wellbeing of mobile workers across 96 countries, with take-up of the service doubling year-on-year since its inception.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Neither the 2008 economic crisis nor the proliferation of ICTs dislodged the practice of business travel. Despite the temporary disruption of international travel due to Covid-19, business travel is becoming ever more central to global economies as businesses increasingly internationalise. The majority of business travel worldwide relies on passenger aviation, and, for millions of people globally, business travel has become nearly routine in their workplaces, while the global mobile workforce has been forecasted to grow to 1.87 billion by 2022. Although a handful of past studies have teased out some of the negative impacts of business travel on travellers, a taken-for-granted societal perception had persisted that business travel was on the whole, glamorous, and therefore could be viewed as a job perk or benefit. These assumptions had rested within intensifying processes of globalisation that have led to increases in different forms of mobility, with a dominant public, industry and academic understanding of mobility as good.</p> <p>In 2014 Professor Scott Cohen set out to challenge this inherent celebration of mobility with Professor Stefan Gössling (Lund University, Sweden). Cohen is a leading scholar in mobilities studies, a social sciences approach exploring the movements of people, materials and ideas, and the societal implications of those movements. He is known for his foundational work in problematising social and environmental aspects of lifestyle mobilities and sustainable mobilities (e.g., Cohen et al. 2015; 2016) [R1, R2]. In 2015 Cohen and Gössling published the landmark article 'A darker side of hypermobility'. [R3], which brought to the fore the considerable health and wellbeing impacts of frequent business travel, as well as other frequent or extended mobilities,</p>		

whether they be for leisure, visiting loved ones and/or education. In this article Cohen and Gössling conceptualised frequent or excessive travel as 'hypermobility' and demonstrated that much hypermobility at the global level is facilitated by flying. The article uncovered the deeply embedded mechanisms through which mobility is socially glamorised and juxtaposed these aspects of glamorisation against the negative impacts of frequent travel, which had largely been overlooked by academia, industry and society more widely. The research was the first to comprehensively reveal the considerable physiological, psychological, emotional and social consequences of hypermobility, ranging from chronic disruption of circadian rhythm, exhaustion, and radiation exposure, to loneliness, isolation, and reduced social capital.

Framing frequent travel through a mobilities approach, which allows for a critique of the morality of frequent travel, facilitated a level of interdisciplinary critique that past studies had not. The concept of hypermobility made possible a shift in understanding away from the taken-for-granted value of frequent travel. This was evident shortly after the publication of the article, as the initial research was quickly taken up by the global media, precipitating hundreds of online media comments by readers, many of them frequent travellers or their spouses. Working with Dr Paul Hanna (Surrey), a specialist in discourse analysis, Cohen and Gössling used these comments to analyse how individuals respond to and cope with the negative health and wellbeing impacts of frequent business travel [R4]. The paper generated recommendations for human resource and corporate travel managers on how to protect employees who travel frequently for work.

Taken together, these two papers [R3, R4] defined a new research agenda around hypermobility and formed a powerful basis for changing the perceptions of both hypermobile travellers and the employers of mobile staff. Where frequent travel had been thought of as a benefit, the research facilitated a new understanding of hypermobility as a burden, a problem with the potential to impact individuals' health, wellbeing and productivity.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[R1] Cohen, S.A., Duncan, T. & Thulemark, M. (2015). Lifestyle mobilities: The crossroads of travel, leisure and migration. *Mobilities*, 10(1), 155-172. DOI: [10.1080/17450101.2013.826481](https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2013.826481)

[R2] Cohen, S.A., Higham, J.E.S., Gössling, S., Peeters, P. & Eijgelaar, E., (2016). Finding effective pathways to sustainable mobility: Bridging the science-policy gap. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 24(3), 317-334. DOI: [10.1080/09669582.2015.1136637](https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2015.1136637)

[R3] Cohen, S.A. & Gössling, S. (2015). A darker side of hypermobility. *Environment and Planning A*, 47, 1661-1679. DOI: [10.1177/0308518X15597124](https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X15597124)

[R4] Cohen, S.A., Hanna, P. & Gössling, S. (2018). The dark side of business travel: A media comments analysis. *Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment*, 61, 406-419. DOI: [10.1016/j.trd.2017.01.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trd.2017.01.004)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Cohen's research on hypermobility has led to an improvement in the emotional wellbeing of hypermobile travellers. An initial Surrey press release led to 'A darker side of hypermobility' being featured 85 times in the media (e.g., Telegraph, Economist, Financial Times, Newsweek, CNN) across 17 countries, with an Altmetrics score of 347. A multi-page feature on the research by Virgin Australia in their August 2016 in-flight magazine wrote "*A darker side of hypermobility' quickly became a major talking point...triggering a lively internet debate about the pros and cons of travelling for work*" [S1]. The value of the research to hypermobile travellers was clear from reader comments in the mainstream press, on frequent flyer web forums, and public blogs across 85 media outlets, ranging from business travellers - "*Never knew of these risks as someone who travels 150 days+ every year*" to airline staff - "*as cabin crew I actually feel a sense of relief when I see these difficulties in print, being recognized and explored from the outside*" [S2].

The initial mass media coverage was followed by a second wave of engagement within industry and trade newsletters and blogs. Cohen's research had starkly revealed a set of risks, hitherto

overlooked by employers, that threatened the health and emotional wellbeing of mobile staff. Corporate travel management consultancy Advito cautioned employers about “*The Cost of Traveller Stress*”, noting that “*This study was one of the first to provide scientific evidence that business travel may be damaging to employees*”, and concluding:

“Travel managers cannot and should not ignore the negative effects of frequent travel. Not only will your employee burnout be high, but ineffective employees can have major costs that lead to low meeting return on investment.” [S3]

Industry concern was picked up within the business risk sector by Drum Cussac, a global risk and security consultancy, which commissioned Cohen to contribute a section on ‘The future of global mobility’ for their ‘Future of Risk’ white paper. Cohen’s contribution, titled ‘Managing the unforeseen risks of a hypermobile workforce: Advice for employers’ provided specific and actionable mitigation strategies for businesses to address the physiological, psychological, emotional and social risks arising from frequent business travel [S4]. The white paper was press-released and directly distributed to 300 of Drum Cussac’s clients.

Echoing these business risk concerns, Maxis GBN, a network of approximately 140 insurance companies worldwide, cited Cohen’s research as a key rationale for their white paper ‘Business Travel – Good for Business, Bad for Health?’, noting that “*Frequent long-haul travel, in particular, is now being seen as having detrimental psychological, social and physical effects on staff*” [S5]. Launched to 3,000 of their clients and network members, who represent all industries and are among the largest 2,500 multinationals globally, the white paper was made publicly available and viewed more than 8,000 times. Maxis’ Global Director of Marketing & Communications reflected that:

“While I think we all understand that frequent long-haul travel will not be good for us, the truth is surprisingly more dramatic than most of us thought... we have used all of our communicative means – print, digital and social media, webinar, presentations and articles to spread the word... It has, unquestionably, made our clients think more about their policies and procedures” [S6].

Industry coverage by insurers, management consultancies, employer associations and law firms moved the health risks of hypermobility up the management agenda of businesses. It was evident that Cohen’s research had identified a problem that demanded business solutions. International SOS, the world’s largest medical and travel security services firm, took Cohen’s research as a starting point for an on-demand webinar and white paper titled ‘Business Travel and Emotional Support Study’, from which they launched the world’s first emotional support service for the mobile workforce [S7, S8]. This service aims to safeguard and improve the emotional wellbeing of mobile workers and prevent business disruption resulting from psychological issues experienced during international assignments. To bring the emotional support service to market, International SOS changed their business model and made significant investments, including training all 26 of their Assistance Centres globally on how to implement the service, and thousands of their employees in its use. The emotional support service has become a permanent product for International SOS and has allowed them to give a more holistic offering to their clients, who account for nearly two-thirds of the Fortune Global 500 companies. International SOS now views emotional support as the third pillar of their business, alongside their medical and security services.

Since its inception in 2017, International SOS’ emotional support service has gained significant traction: 1,000 out of 5,000 of their client organisations now use the service. Clients include both major corporations, who have business travellers and workers on expatriate assignments, and universities who have staff and students working and studying abroad. The emotional support service provides 24/7, every day of the year rapid-response psychological counselling in over 60 languages tailored to the mobile workforce, by phone, videocall, or face-to-face. Example end-users include [S9]:

- a study-abroad student in Australia contemplating self-harm
- an employee on assignment in the Czech Republic suffering from stress
- ex-patriate employees confined to their workplace due to conflict in South Sudan
- shipping vessel officers emotionally overwhelmed by the death of a fellow mariner while en-route to Japan

Whilst the majority demand for the service is from frequent business travellers or those on overseas deployments, the service increasingly responds to other forms of mobile work and study, reflecting the breadth of hypermobility first identified in Cohen's research.

The cumulative significance of the emotional support service to the individuals that avail themselves of its support cannot be rigorously quantified as their use of the service is kept strictly confidential. Up to July 2019 it has helped end-users across 96 countries, with more than 600 individual cases, and the number of individuals availing themselves of the service has been doubling year-on-year since its inception. User testimonials suggest clear improvements in mental health and emotional wellbeing of hypermobile travellers because of the service:

"The counselling has really been life-changing. I feel that I am able to focus at work and spend time with my son. I don't feel so overwhelmed." [S9]

Despite the pausing of most international travel due to the Covid-19 pandemic, hypermobility is likely to bounce back as an issue again once travel resumes. Thus far from negative the value of Cohen's research, Covid-19 show us new possibilities in how frequent travel and mobile work will return, and we intend to continue to build on this line of research.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[S1] Virgin Australia, 2016, On the road again. Retrieved from: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b128767a2772c129c887f95/t/5b220ed78a922d335eb2c754/1528958686335/On-the-road-again.pdf>

[S2] Spreadsheet tracking media coverage and comments on the underpinning research

[S3] Advito, 2016, The cost of traveller stress, Retrieved from: <https://www.advito.com/the-cost-of-traveler-stress/>

[S4] Drum Cussac, 2019, The future of risk. Retrieved from: <https://information.drum-cussac.com/the-future-of-risk/>

[S5] Maxis GBN, 2017, Business travel – Good for business, bad for health? The potential impact of frequent, long-haul travel on the health and wellbeing of your employees. Retrieved from: <https://maxis-gbn.com/Maxis-GBN/files/0e/0ec1e8b5-fee3-4a2b-94a0-51ab0e27ea16.pdf>

[S6] Testimonial emails from Maxis GBN (PDF)

[S7] Testimonial letter from International SOS (PDF)

[S8] International SOS, 2017, Business Travel and Emotional Support Study – Australasia. Retrieved from: <http://images.learn.internationalsos.com/Web/InternationalSOS/%7B4f2cdb55-7b96-404e-93b3-c70c003225fc%7D%20International%20SOS%202017%20Business%20Travel%20and%20Emotional%20Support%20Study%20Australasia.pdf>

[S9a] International SOS, End-user case studies: Emotional support for a student studying abroad. Retrieved from: <https://www.internationalsos.com/case-studies/case-study-folder/emotional-support-for-a-student-studying-abroad>

[S9b] Emotional support for an international assignee. Retrieved from: <https://www.internationalsos.com/case-studies/case-study-folder/emotional-support-for-an-international-assignee>

[S9c] Emotional support for victims of confinement in South Sudan. Retrieved from: <https://www.internationalsos.com/case-studies/case-study-folder/emotional-support-for-victims-of-confinement-in-south-sudan>

[S9d] Overwhelmed on a shipping vessel: Retrieved from: <https://www.internationalsos.com/case-studies/case-study-folder/overwhelmed-on-a-shipping-vessel>